U.S. Department of State
Annual Report on International Religious Freedom for 1999: Indonesia

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INDONESIA

Section I. Freedom of Religion

The Constitution provides for religious freedom for members of five out of six officially recognized religions and belief in one supreme god. The Government generally respects these provisions; however, some restrictions on certain types of religious activity, including unrecognized religions, exist. Law No. 1/1965 states that the Government "embraces" Islam, Protestantism, Roman Catholicism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Confucianism. However, subsequently issued regulations have severely restricted the practice of Confucianism. While the law only formally embraces these religions, it explicitly states that other religions, including Judaism, Zoroastarianism, Shinto, and Taoism are not forbidden. The Government permits the practice of other religions, including Sikhism and the mystical, traditional beliefs of "Aliran Kepercayaan." The People's Consultative Assembly adopted a new Human Rights Charter in November 1998, which provides for citizen's freedom to practice their religion without specifying any particular religions.

Restrictions exist on certain types of religious activity, including restrictions on officially recognized religions. For example, a number of regulations enacted subsequent to the passage of Law No. 1/1965 severely restrict the practice of Confucianism. Moreover, a 1976 decision by the Attorney General, reinforced by a separate decision by the same office in 1978, banned Jehovah's Witnesses from practicing their faith. Jehovah's Witnesses claim significant persecution, including detention and torture, which lasted until 1997. Open practice of this faith remains banned. The Government in some provinces has banned the messianic Islamic sect, Darul Arqam. Baha'is have not reported problems in recent months. The Government closely monitors Islamic groups considered to be deviating from orthodox tenets and in the past has dissolved such groups. Historically, the Government has tried to control "heterodox" Muslim groups, due to pressure by nongovernmental leaders of "mainstream" or "orthodox" Muslim groups as well as the Government's concern for national unity. In addition, "mainstream" Christian leaders have influenced government policy to be biased against "fundamentalist" Christians. Non-Trinitarians (Jehovah's Witnesses) have faced government bans that they claim were instigated by Trinitarian Christians.

The legal requirement to adhere to the official state ideology, "Pancasila," extends to all religious and secular organizations. Because the first tenet of Pancasila is belief in one

supreme god, atheism is forbidden. Individuals are not compelled to practice any particular faith. All citizens must choose formally designation as members of one of the five officially recognized religions. As this choice must be noted on official documents, such as the identification card, failure to identify a religion can make it impossible to obtain such documents. Members of other religious communities must be identified with one of five sanctioned religions. For example, Confucians are generally classified as Buddhists and government bureaucrats generally classify Sikhs as Hindus.

The population, estimated at 211,000,000, is approximately 85 percent Muslim, 10 percent Christian, 2 percent Hindu, and 1 to 1.5 percent Buddhist, with the remainder members of other religions. Animism still is practiced in remote regions of Kalimantan and Irian Jaya.

Muslims are the majority population in most regions of Sumatra and Java. Muslims also predominate in regions of Sulawesi and Kalimantan and are present as minorities in most other parts of the country. The vast majority of Muslims are Sunni, although there are also Shi'a and adherents of Sufism, Ahmadiyah, and other branches of Islam. The Muslim community consists of "modernist," mainly urban, communities, which adhere more closely to orthodox Sunni theology, and larger "traditionalist" communities, composed mainly of rural Javanese Muslims, who incorporate some elements of Javanese mysticism, Hinduism, and Buddhism into their practice of Islam.

Most Christians reside in the eastern part of the country. Roman Catholicism is the predominant religion in the provinces of Nusa Tengara Timor and Maluku. In the easternmost province of Irian Jaya, Protestants are predominant in the north and Catholics are the majority in the south. Other significant Christian populations are located in North Sumatra, seat of the influential Batak Protestant Church, which in early 1999 reunited after a government-manipulated division in 1993. There are also significant Christian populations in west and central Java, and in Kalimantan. Many urban Sino-Indonesians adhere to Christian faiths as well.

Migration, both government-sponsored and spontaneous, is gradually increasing the Muslim population in eastern Indonesia. Some Christian critics have alleged that the Government has attempted to alter the demographic balance of eastern Indonesia by resettling Muslims in the area and providing various subsidies for those who settle spontaneously. The critics claim that growing communal violence in eastern Indonesia is a product of this policy. However, government programs have not sponsored most Muslims who have moved into the region.

Most Hindus live in Bali, where they form about 93 percent of the population. Balinese Hinduism has developed various local characteristics that distinguish it from Hinduism as practiced on the Indian subcontinent. There is also a significant Hindu minority (the Keharingan) in central Kalimantan.

Seven schools of Buddhism are practiced in Indonesia: Buddhayana, Mahayana, Theravada, Tridharma, Kasogatan, Nichiren, and Maitreya. Most, but not all, Buddhists are of ethnic Chinese origin. Like the Sino-Indonesian population, most Buddhists are located in major urban and trading centers, rather than rural areas.

Following the fall of the Soeharto regime in May 1998, a number of political groups have emerged that actively advocate a more prominent role for Islam in society. However, there is currently minimal public support for the establishment of an Islamic state. Historically, the Government has opposed strongly Muslim groups that advocate the establishment an Islamic state or the supplanting of civil law with Shari'a (Islamic law). However, some Islamic political parties and Islamic groups are attempting to establish what they describe as "an Islamic society."

During the period covered by this report, high-level government officials continued to make public statements and demonstrate by example the importance of respect for religious diversity. In April 1999, for example, the Minister of Religion attended the dedication ceremony for a new Sikh temple in North Jakarta. In February 1999, the

Ministry of Religion launched a campaign to provide training in multiculturalism and conflict resolution for Muslim and Christian religious clergy in 100 provincial subdistricts (kabupaten) across the country. Ministry officials claim that the program already has received very positive feedback from participants. Prominent religious figures such as Abdurrahman Wahid, the leader of the 30-million member Nahdlatul Ulama, have made strong appeals against sectarian violence. Political leader Amien Rais formed a political party, the People's Mandate Party (PAN), based largely on his large Islamic following but also specifically including religious and ethnic minorities in senior positions.

However, notwithstanding the public positions of tolerance adopted by senior government officials, lower level officials frequently were alleged to be reluctant to facilitate and protect the rights of religious minorities. Minority houses of worship particularly have been targeted for damage or destruction during riots (see Section II). Both churches and mosques have been targeted; most often churches, but several mosques were destroyed in riots in Kupang, West Timor in November 1998 and one at the beginning of 1999 in Irian Jaya. Attacks against minority houses of worship and the lack of an effective government response to punish perpetrators and prevent further attacks led to allegations of official complicity in some of the incidents or, at a minimum, allowing them to occur with impunity.

A 1969 regulation dictates that before a house of worship can be built, agreement must be obtained from local residents living near the site, and a license must be obtained from the regional office of the Ministry of Religion. Some Christians claim that this regulation is used to discriminate against them and to prevent them from building churches. Despite the problems, the building of churches continues, sometimes without permits. Muslims contend that Christians, in some instances, seek to erect churches in areas with small Christian populations with the aim of creating a base in a Muslim area in order to proselytize.

The law allows conversion between faiths, and such conversions occur. Independent observers note that interfaith marriages between Muslims and non-Muslims have become increasingly difficult. Persons from religions outside the five accepted religions have difficulty having their marriages recognized officially.

The Government views proselytizing by recognized religions in areas heavily dominated by another recognized religion as potentially disruptive and discourages it. Foreign missionary activities are relatively unimpeded, although in East Timor, Irian Jaya, and occasionally elsewhere missionaries have experienced difficulties and delays in renewing residence permits. In addition, visas allowing the entrance of new foreign clergy are sometimes difficult to obtain. Foreign citizens present in the country on tourist visas may be deported for proselytizing. Laws and decrees from the 1970's limit the number of years that foreign missionaries can spend in Indonesia, although a number of extensions are granted in remote areas like Irian Jaya. Foreign missionary work is subject to the funding stipulations of the 1984 ORMAS law, which regulates the activities of all nongovernment "mass" organizations in Indonesia.

There was no change in the Government's respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report; however, there was deterioration in societal attitudes toward religious freedom. In the face of numerous instances of interreligious violence and attacks on churches, mosques, temples, and other religious facilities, the Government's efforts generally have not been effective. The Government has not resolved fully most cases of such attacks during riots, and in other cases has not investigated at all. In some instances, security forces showed reluctance to intervene, while in others they used excessive force in response to intercommunal clashes. In Ambon from January through March 1999, for example, security forces killed dozens in a series of incidents during fighting between Muslims and Christians. Most of these deaths appeared to result when security forces fired on violent mobs, although there were some reports that security forces fired on peaceful crowds, including a crowd leaving a mosque after morning prayers in early March. A number of Christian sources claimed that elements of the Indonesian security forces initially deployed in response to the violence were biased

against Christians, and other units appeared to be biased against Muslims. The suddenness with which the violence flared led to accusations that provocateurs from the military, government, or political factions had encouraged the clashes; the National Police Chief in February referred to "provocateurs in the field following orders by coordinators" and pointed to involvement by political forces in Jakarta in the riots. However, neither he nor other sources provided any proof of these allegations.

Security forces and locally based militias supported by elements of the military were also involved in extrajudicial killings and other abuses in East Timor during 1998 and the first half of 1999. Although the security forces were predominately Muslim and the East Timorese are predominately Catholic, these abuses were not motivated by religious differences but resulted from government efforts to stem support for independence for the province.

For the first time since the beginning of the Soeharto regime, religiously oriented parties, predominantly Islamic but including some Christian, were allowed to form and to contest the 1999 parliamentary elections. Christian parties did not do very well, but Muslim parties won about 30 percent of the vote.

The Government actively promotes mutual tolerance and harmony among officially recognized religions. Citizens practicing the recognized religions maintain active links with coreligionists inside and outside the country and travel abroad for religious gatherings. The Government both facilitates and regulates Muslims' participation in the annual Hajj pilgrimages to Mecca.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners during the period covered by this report.

There were no reports of the forced religious conversion of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the Government's refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Section II. Societal Attitudes

The concept of religious freedom generally is accepted within society. Religious organizations, nongovernmental organizations (NGO's), and individuals regularly conduct programs and activities aimed at promoting tolerance and cooperation between different religious communities. In the political sphere, leading opposition figures regularly address the need for interreligious harmony. Several of the major political opposition parties and the current ruling party are nonsectarian.

However, distrust, fear, and intolerance among different religious communities also are present in society. Many violent manifestations of religious intolerance occurred during the period covered by this report. In many areas, religious differences separate groups that are also ethnically or culturally different, such as Sino-Indonesians or East Timorese.

On April 19, 1999, a small bomb exploded in the Mesjid Istiqlal, the country's largest mosque, injuring six persons. The Government is still investigating the incident. An arson attack against a Catholic community center in Ujung Pandang, South Sulawesi early on April 20 reportedly was intended as retaliation for the mosque bombing.

Beginning in January 1999, a series of killings occurred in Ciamis, West Java. While some of the victims were alleged to practice traditional magic, there does not appear to have been a clear connection to that religious tradition as was the case in East Java, where such "black magic" figures were hunted down and killed. In Banyuwangi, East Java, killings of religious mystics by unknown elements, which began in mid-1998, subsequently expanded to include Islamic figures and spread to neighboring districts. Scores of murders occurred. The motives and identities of those behind the killings remain obscure. Associates of the victims criticized the lack of police or military response and said that the attacks were politically motivated.

Some of the worst interreligious violence erupted in Maluku province in January 1999 and continued well into the year, spreading to neighboring islands (notably the Kai island chain). The fighting had both religious and ethnic overtones but principally involved Muslims--both Muslims from the neighboring island of Sulawesi and Ambonese Muslims on one side--and Christians, mostly Protestants, on the other. More than 300 persons died and tens of thousands were displaced by the fighting in the early part of 1999, according to press and other sources. Clashes began in the provincial capital of Ambon in January, then spread to other islands in the Maluku province, disrupting a long tradition in the region of mutual tolerance between the two communities. According to some Ambonese, the traditionally good relations between Christians and Muslims were strained due to the arrival of less integrated Muslim newcomers from other parts of Indonesia, who threatened to upset the ethnic balance of the province. Economic competition between the two communities also appeared to play a role in the violence. Extensive damage resulted in Ambon, where houses, shops, and places of worship were burned and violent mobs fought, some armed with spears or machetes. Violence began to subside in April after the Government sent in a team of Muslim and Christian military leaders native to Ambon to oversee security for the region.

In West Kalimantan, also during the early part of 1999, fighting broke out between the indigenous population--Dayaks (mostly Christian or animist) and Malayu (mostly Muslim)--who clashed with Madurese migrants (Muslims). Again, ethnic differences and tensions between indigenous people and newcomers appeared to be the source of the conflict, rather than religious differences.

During the period covered by this report, there were numerous instances of attacks on churches, mosques, temples, and other religious facilities. There were also instances of preaching and publications against Christians, which led to concerns that societal support for religious tolerance was under pressure. Between January 1998 and late April 1999, Christian groups recorded 168 instances of attacks on churches and other Christian facilities. The attacks ranged in severity from broken windowpanes to total destruction. The Government has not resolved fully most cases of attacks on religious facilities and churches that occurred during riots, and in other cases has not investigated at all.

In late November 1998, a brawl in Ketapang, West Jakarta, between Muslim local residents and Christian security guards of a gambling den, who were mainly of Ambonese descent, escalated into a riot in which 14 were killed and 27 local churches and Christian schools were attacked and in some cases destroyed. The anti-Christian violence in Jakarta prompted retaliatory anti-Muslim violence in Kupang, West Timor, in late November and early December. In Kupang (where Muslims are a minority), Christian mobs burned mosques, homes and shops belonging to Muslims. Dozens of Muslims were injured. In both the Jakarta and Kupang incidents, interethnic tensions, as well as interreligious tensions, were factors contributing to the violence.

On July 24, 1998, a Protestant church was burned in the Depok area of south Jakarta. The church's congregation was Batak, an ethnic group with origins in north Sumatra. Although the church was in close proximity to a police station, the mob spent hours demolishing it to its foundations with sledgehammers. Police made no attempt to stop the destruction and have made no progress in investigating the incident. Church officials there repeated a perspective shared by some other Christian officials that, while the anti-Christian sentiment behind this violence is not new, the impunity associated with such acts is new and has contributed significantly to such attacks following the fall of the Soeharto Government and the coming to power of President B.J. Habibie.

On the other hand, violence in general has accompanied the developments following the fall of President Soeharto, some of which has involved factors stemming from the country's current economic downturn. Security forces, widely criticized for previous human rights violations, have for various reasons also shown reluctance to intervene, as they routinely did under Soeharto, to stop religious and ethnic disputes from turning violent.

On February 13, 1998, serious anti-Christian and anti-ethnic Chinese violence broke out

in west Java. Twenty-eight churches were attacked in several towns east and southeast of Jakarta. Mobs stoned windows, vandalized interiors, and in some cases attempted to burn the churches. Cars and other property belonging to the church and church members also were targeted for vandalism. Incidents such as these reflect religious tensions, as well as in some cases underlying socioeconomic and political tensions between poor Muslims and relatively more affluent ethnic Chinese Christians.

Muslims are a religious minority in the easternmost province of Irian Jaya. In January 1998, a mosque was burned in a small village near Kurima in the central highlands of Irian Jaya. The attack on the mosque apparently was motivated by local sentiment against the efforts of Muslim missionaries to win converts in the predominantly Christian province. The incident also reflected local resentment of the arrival in the province of mainly Muslim migrants from other parts of the country either under government sponsored "transmigration" programs or with the encouragement of various government incentives. Interreligious tensions remain high in the province. In the past, mosques also have been targeted for destruction in the province of East Timor.

Section III. U.S. Government Policy

The Ambassador and embassy staff routinely conveyed to government officials at all levels the U.S. view that religious freedom must be respected and fostered. In addition, throughout the period covered by this report, the Ambassador and embassy staff regularly met with leaders of religious communities to keep abreast of developments affecting religious freedom.

In January 1999, newly appointed Special Representative for Religious Freedom Abroad, Dr. Robert Seiple, visited Indonesia. He met with leaders of major religious communities, the Minister of Religion, other senior government officials, and other active members of civil society, and conveyed the strong U.S. commitment to supporting religious freedom as an integral aspect of human rights.

The Embassy publicly criticized the interreligious violence that occurred in various parts of the country. The Embassy also repeatedly urged the Government to take all appropriate measures to halt interreligious killings in these and other areas and to prevent its recurrence or repetition elsewhere.

The United States Information Service (USIS) supported the trip of a prominent Islamic scholar, Nurcholish Madjid, to Vice President Gore's February 1999 conference on the role of religion in combating corruption. USIS also funded two senior Fulbright scholars who taught at the State Islamic Institute (IAIN) in Jakarta.

The U.S. Government also provides significant funding for NGO's implementing projects to promote religious tolerance in various parts of the country.

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